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Orgl I Care Inc.
Linder, John

Petitions for Hanoi on POWs

By Leon W. Lindsay

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Atlanta Need for \$2,000

Can North Vietnam be pressured into providing information about — and perhaps even freeing — American servicemen now held in its prisoner-of-war camps?

An Atlanta dentist who has studied Hanoi's tactics and diplomatic moves closely says that it can. Last February Dr. John Linder founded "I Care, Inc." with the purpose of applying that pressure.

With the help mostly of a few close friends, he has managed to distribute more than 500,000 "personal petitions" which concerned Americans are urged to sign and return to the group's headquarters here.

So far, says Dr. Linder, some 55,000 have been signed and returned. But after expending countless hours and about \$1,500, the "small band of 'I Care' workers in Atlanta and a few other cities now is looking for more funds and manpower.

What petition says

The petition very simply declares: "I care about the inhumane treatment American servicemen are receiving as prisoners in Southeast Asia." There is a space for the signer's name and address.

Dr. Linder says he got the idea for the drive from the efforts of Texas millionaire H. Ross Perot to take packages to prisoners in North Vietnam.

Though Mr. Perot did not succeed, Dr. Linder noted, the publicity his effort generated appeared to have some impact on the North Vietnamese. Hanoi began releasing some information about the men being held.

Also, continued pressure by the wives of missing servicemen seems to have had some results. Dr. Linder noticed that it apparently was not sympathy which moved Hanoi's leaders, but adverse publicity in the Western press.

Prospects assessed

The Atlanta dentist—who is well versed in the history, legal aspects, and diplomatic atmosphere of the Vietnam situation—decided that thousands of personal petitions from Americans—plus generous publicity by the media—would have a definite effect on Hanoi.

The aims of "I Care" are threefold, he explains:

- Induce North Vietnam to release the names of all Americans being held.
- Get Hanoi to allow inspection of prison camps.
- Obtain the right to send food, mail, medical supplies, and other packages to the prisoners.

When he started out, Dr. Linder says he envisioned an eight-week campaign. Now he realizes it will take longer. Organization, money, and publicity are the major problems.

The financial need is not large. If sources can be found for an additional \$2,000, Dr. Linder thinks the Atlanta headquarters could continue its work for a considerable period.

As for organization, Dr. Linder thinks it is possible that affiliates in other states and cities will be able to share legally in the tax-free status which "I Care, Inc." enjoys.

Loosely knit groups have formed in several Georgia cities. And in Minnesota Dr. Linder's home city of Minneapolis now has a functioning group.

A recent Associated Press article brought 397 responses from 27 states, the youthful dentist reports. There have been some 75 requests for help in starting local groups.

Postage is the main expense for the groups, and diligent volunteer workers are their greatest need, Dr. Linder says.

Geneva convention cited

Current plans are to send the thousands of personal petitions to Hanoi in one package, probably through some intermediary, explains Dr. Linder.

The basis for the appeal for humane treatment is the Geneva convention. Some people argue that the convention does not apply to the Indo-China war, since war has never been declared. But Dr. Linder believes that such undeclared warfare is covered under the treaty's provisions.

He also notes that North Vietnam signed the Geneva convention in 1957.

The most successful drive so far of "I Care" was on a recent weekend in metropolitan Atlanta. The Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta sponsored "I Care Sunday" on May 17, and 163 churches participated.

"I Care, Inc.," can be reached at P. O. Box 931, Atlanta, Ga., 30301.